



2014 State of the State Address

January 21, 2014

Thank you, Lieutenant Governor Kinder, Speaker Jones, President Pro Tem Dempsey, judges of the Missouri Supreme Court, state officials, members of the legislature, members of my cabinet, and my fellow Missourians.

With us tonight are Missouri's exceptional First Lady, Georganne, and our son, Will.

Tonight, we are honored to be joined by Missourians who put their lives on the line to protect the lives of others. Whether they fight our enemies abroad or protect our communities at home, these ordinary men and women do extraordinary things. They are real heroes.

On August 6, in the dark of night, deadly flash floods struck several Missouri communities without warning. In Pulaski County, creeks became raging rivers, rising by as much as 23 feet – inundating homes, washing out roads and, ultimately, claiming lives.

There were many acts of bravery that night, as state and local emergency personnel fanned out to look for folks who needed help.

Two local firefighters had been attempting to rescue a man and a young child, when their boat capsized in the rushing water, leaving all four of them clinging to a single guidewire.

Another local first responder had been holding two women above water for thirty minutes, never giving up on the rescue attempt, but tiring.

Fortunately, Corporal Lance DeClue and Lieutenant Justin McCullough of our Missouri State Highway Patrol were on duty that night.

Overcoming darkness and debris, pouring rain and treacherous floodwaters, and even a stalled rescue boat, troopers DeClue and McCullough got all seven of these individuals to safety.

Three years ago, when we worked together to merge the State Highway and Water Patrols, we knew this change would improve efficiency and reduce overhead. It has. But in the rushing waters that night, it was clear that the benefits of this reform went way beyond balance sheets. It saved lives.

I'd like us all to recognize Corporal DeClue and Lieutenant McCullough, who are with us tonight. Please join me in thanking them for their service and heroism.

These brave Missourians remind us that the true strength of our state cannot be measured in bricks or bushels, but in the talents and tenacity of our citizens.

Here in Missouri, folks don't shy away from challenges – they work together to tackle them. Getting up early... working hard... staying late... and looking out for one another.

And thanks to the people of Missouri, the state of our state is strong, and growing stronger with each passing day.

In every corner of our state, wages are up, personal income is up, and unemployment continues to fall.

In fact, since I took office in January 2009, Missouri's unemployment rate has dropped from 8.6 percent to 6.1 percent, and it's been below the national average for 51 straight months.

Since this time last year, Missouri has added nearly 44,000 jobs. And when you look at the pace of private sector job growth, Missouri was top 10 in the nation – better than every single one of our neighboring states.

Agriculture exports from Missouri have increased by more than a billion dollars over the past five years – 71 percent – thanks to Missouri farmers and ranchers.

Behind these impressive numbers are significant investments by companies that are hiring and growing all across our state – high-tech global brands like Monsanto, Expedia, Express Scripts and Cerner, to name just a few, along with small businesses and startups like CoFactor Genomics in St. Louis and Brewer Science in Rolla.

We all know that if you want to win, you've got to compete. That's why I want to thank this General Assembly for helping us make Missouri a finalist for the Boeing 777X. We didn't win the biggest prize – but we competed at the highest level.

It's important to remember, it was just three and a half years ago, that we came together in another special session that also had very high stakes.

Auto plants had closed. Jobs had gone overseas. And folks thought it wouldn't be long before the last Missouri-made vehicle rolled off the line.

But instead of giving up, we took action.

Together, we passed the Missouri Manufacturing Jobs Act, we upped our investments in workforce training, and we saved Missouri's auto industry.

Today, Missouri's automotive comeback continues to make headlines. Just look at last week:

On Sunday, GM unveiled the all-new Missouri-made GMC Canyon....

On Monday, Ford unveiled the all-new Missouri-made F-150...

Later that day, we welcomed a new automotive supplier – Janesville Acoustics – and over 150 jobs to Warrensburg.

And on Thursday, Ford announced the hiring of the 1,000th worker to build the Ford Transit van, previously built exclusively overseas.

Ask any autoworker in Claycomo or Wentzville about the pride they take in building the next-generation of American-made vehicles, and they'll tell you it means a lot more than just a paycheck.

For those autoworkers and their families, the work we do here is very real.

Our economic progress is no accident. It's the result of a clear and unwavering focus on strict fiscal discipline and smart investments.

We're the Show-Me State, so we developed a strategic plan, and we followed it.

Instead of engaging in Washington-style deficit spending, we kept our fiscal discipline – balancing budgets, cutting waste and keeping taxes low. This past year, all three major rating agencies reaffirmed Missouri's perfect AAA credit rating.

Tonight, as I have every year, I am proposing a balanced budget that holds the line on taxes – and continues to downsize government, cutting 81 more positions from state payrolls. By the end of this fiscal year, we will have reduced the state workforce by 4,600 full-time employees.

But we didn't just make government smaller – we made it smarter. We reduced energy use, sold off surplus property and put more state services online. My budget continues to invest in technology to provide Missourians with the efficient, effective, accountable government they deserve.

Keeping our fiscal house in order helped us protect our shared values. We made sure that as we moved our economy forward, we didn't leave folks behind: a young child with autism, a student working her way through college, a family rebuilding after a natural disaster, or a soldier returning from the frontlines.

Four years ago, we launched Show-Me Heroes to help employers recruit and hire our men and women in uniform. Two years ago, we strengthened it by making sure these veterans also get the training they need. Today, Show-Me Heroes continues to change lives.

I recently visited one of the 3,400 Missouri companies that have taken the Show-Me Heroes pledge. At IBM in Columbia, we recognized the 5,000th veteran employed through this program.

Our veterans fought for us – so we're going to be there for them.

For every soldier serving our country overseas, there's a family back here at home – putting on a brave face each day for the kids. Families who, in soldiering on through the loneliness, lend their loved ones strength, lend us all strength – and so it's important that we honor their sacrifice as well.

Tonight we are joined by Heather Styles and her daughters, Paige and Payton. Heather's husband of 11 years, Maj. Matthew Styles, is a helicopter pilot on his second deployment to Afghanistan. While he serves our country at war, Heather is holding down the fort at their home here in Jefferson City.

They represent thousands of military families all across our state who are counting down the days while their loved ones are in harm's way. Please join me in thanking the Styles family for their service and sacrifice, and wishing Major Styles a safe and speedy return home.

Together, we've laid a solid foundation that got us through some tough economic times, and has brought us to a defining moment for our state.

Now, with our economy picking up steam, how do we build on that foundation?

With Washington paralyzed by politics, what can we do here in Missouri to make a lasting difference for real people?

And when it's always easier to do the small things and then declare victory, how do we tackle the big challenges? The things that matter most: good schools, good jobs, and healthy communities for our kids to grow up in.

Missouri is a diverse state. Just here in this room, we've got farmers and small business owners; artists and outdoorsmen. There aren't many things every single one of us would agree on.

But here's one we can:

Our single greatest responsibility – as elected officials, as parents, as citizens of our state – is to make sure every child in Missouri has an opportunity to achieve his or her dreams.

And we all know, that opportunity starts with education.

For centuries, public education has been a value we cherish as Americans, a value we've reaffirmed time after time.

In the 1700s, Thomas Jefferson called for a public education system that would safeguard our young democracy from tyranny and oppression.

In the 1800s, we established the land grant university system, including the University of Missouri and Lincoln University.

By 1900, every state in the nation had free public elementary schools.

And when the Greatest Generation returned home from World War II – after literally saving the free world – a grateful nation honored them with something far more precious – and patriotic – than a ticker tape parade: the GI Bill.

Shepherded through Congress by Missouri Senator Champ Clark, the GI Bill gave millions of Americans an opportunity their parents never had: the chance to earn a college degree without going into debt.

Think of the impact that it had: between 1940 and 1950, the number of degrees awarded by U.S. colleges and universities more than doubled. Over the next half century, the percentage of Americans with a college degree quintupled.

They became engineers and small business owners; scientists and Supreme Court Justices; Presidents and preschool teachers.

They bought homes, started families, and launched companies – creating the modern middle class, and driving a postwar economic boom unlike anything the world had ever seen.

We're joined by one of them tonight.

Dr. Frank Fontana of St. Louis served in the Army during World War II, and followed the frontlines all the way to Berlin. When he came home, the GI Bill provided him the opportunity to get a degree in optometry, and later he started his own practice.

He married the love of his life, Dorris, and they had two sons who they put through school. The GI Bill gave Frank the

opportunity to pursue his dreams, to support his family, and become a great optometrist. I should know – he was mine.

Please join me in thanking Dr. Frank Fontanta for his service and for reminding us what the American dream is all about.

This nation's greatest generation made a commitment to education – and as a result, they made the United States the driver of the global economy and the undisputed leader of the free world.

Now, it's our turn to carry on that legacy.

Now, we must work to help every child start school ready to learn.

We must demand that every school is getting the job done.

And, we must make sure that every student can afford to get a college degree.

Together, let's resolve to give our children and grandchildren more opportunities, better opportunities than we had, and build the future they deserve.

We need to start early. Parents and teachers see it every day: the first few years of a child's development have an impact that lasts a lifetime.

A child who starts kindergarten ready to learn, is more likely to succeed in school, go to college, and get a good job.

Working together, over the last year, we've expanded access to early childhood education, giving more children the opportunity to go to high quality preschool in their communities.

But this year, it's time that we do much more. Kids grow up fast – so there's no time to waste. We must work together to make sure our kids start smart.

And that's why my budget will nearly triple funding for the Missouri Preschool Program.

We will provide quality early learning opportunities to thousands more kids all across Missouri. But that's just the beginning.

As many of you know, Georganne and I spend a lot of time at Missouri's schools – touring classrooms, talking to students, meeting with teachers and staff. Sometimes, I shoot a few hoops.

Our schools are the hearts of our communities. They're where we gather for picnics and dances, ball games and bingo – where lifelong friendships are made, and fundamental values are learned.

And in today's global economy, whether you root for the DeSoto Dragons, the Sikeston Bulldogs or the Mound City Panthers, our K-12 schools must also be rigorous, high-tech institutions of innovation.

More technology. Smaller class sizes. Well-prepared teachers. The tools our kids need to succeed.

Accomplishing that goal is going to take an unwavering commitment by all of us, and it's going to take money.

That's why my budget increases funding for our K-12 classrooms this year by \$278 million, and will put us on a path to

fully funding the foundation formula next year.

Every one of us has run for office. And when we knocked on doors and folks asked if we believed in public education – we all said yes. And at every town hall meeting, when someone raised their hand and asked what we'd do for teachers – we said we'd support them. And on the campaign trail, I'll bet almost all of us made a promise to invest in our students and our schools.

Well, you know what? It's time to put our budgets where our campaign brochures are.

Now it's time to decide whether we're merely going to talk about public education, or whether we're going to fund it.

This is the test – and this is the year – to get serious about fully funding our schools. Our local schools will put these dollars to work in a big way for our kids and communities.

Here are just a few of the priorities that school districts have already identified:

In Kennett, every student will have a computer.

In Fort Zumwalt, 50 additional teachers will reduce class sizes, and give kids the personal attention they need.

In Santa Fe, they'll bring back summer school, and establish the district's first early childhood education program.

Up in Kirksville, they will implement Project Lead the Way – the hands-on curriculum that helps students understand and excel in science.

And in Springfield, 4,000 more three- and four-year-olds will have the opportunity to attend high-quality preschool.

Tonight we are joined by teachers, administrators, and board members from across the state. I'd like you to stand. Please join me in thanking them for taking on the honorable challenge of educating our kids.

And with this commitment to fully funding the formula, we're going to demand accountability and measurable results: tougher classes, higher test scores, and higher graduation rates.

Our students need to be ready to compete worldwide – and that means they have to raise their game, and we need to raise ours too.

We've got to believe in education so much, that we commit to making it better.

And when we talk about education – there is something that always bears repeating: there is no more honorable profession than being a teacher.

None of us would be in this room today were it not for the extraordinary people who taught us – and believed in us – years ago.

We are blessed to have so many talented teachers across our state, selfless public servants who stay late to make sure our children don't fall behind, who often dig into their own pockets to make sure they have the materials they need to teach our kids.

And yet each year, there are some who believe the way to build up our schools is to tear down our teachers – trying to cut their pay, or reduce their retirement benefits or threaten their job security.

That simply needs to stop.

Now we can all support making smart reforms to our education system. And of course, we should hold educators accountable for the important job we entrust them to perform.

But instead of attacking public school teachers, we should make it our mission to recruit the best and brightest minds to take on the honorable work of teaching our kids. And that is exactly what this significant education investment will allow our local school districts to do.

Tonight we are pleased to be joined by Tobin Schultz. Ever since he was in the ninth grade, Mr. Schultz knew he wanted to be a teacher – and at Joplin High School, he continues to inspire and motivate students each and every day. Last October, Mr. Schultz won the prestigious Milken Family Foundation National Educator Award.

We were all inspired by how Joplin – even in its darkest hour – rallied behind its students and its schools. Just this month, 1,400 students in Joplin walked in to three brand new schools, marking another milestone in a remarkable recovery.

Mr. Schultz is joined by Joplin High School Principal Dr. Kerry Sachetta, A-Plus Coordinator Susan Day, and Superintendent Dr. C.J. Huff.

Please join me in thanking Mr. Schultz – and all of our teachers – for the vitally important work they do each day.

At Joplin High, Mr. Schultz works hard to make sure kids are prepared to take the next step, and pursue the higher education they need for the careers they want.

Many of us have probably had the same conversation with our kids around the dinner table: we tell them that no matter what they're interested in, the more education they get, the more financially secure they will be.

The numbers are stark: the unemployment rate among high school graduates is more than twice that of college graduates. And by the end of this decade, two-thirds of all jobs will require some kind of college credential.

Together, we've made great strides to make sure that a quality, affordable college education is an option for every family. In fact, over the past five years, Missouri's public universities have led the nation in holding down tuition increases.

Number one.

But we're not done yet. Working together, we're going to make sure students graduate from college with the skills to compete for good jobs, not a load of debt.

That's why I have called on our four-year institutions to once again freeze tuition for Missouri undergraduates.

That's right – under my budget, Missouri undergraduates at our public universities should not have to pay a penny more for tuition next year. Not a penny.

And no student should have to settle for less education, just because their parents make less money.

So we're doing something about that. My budget puts additional dollars behind our Access Missouri Scholarship program so that students from low-income families can get the financial aid they need.

And we'll make sure Bright Flight lives up to its original mission of keeping our best and brightest students here in Missouri during college and after they graduate.

Finally, I'm proud to report that we've taken our A-Plus Schools program statewide, adding 266 schools since 2009 – giving thousands more students the opportunity to earn an A-Plus Scholarship.

Today, all across Missouri, students who work hard, play by the rules and give back to their communities can attend two years of community college – tuition free.

But affordability is only part of the equation.

Once again, core funding for our colleges and universities will be awarded based on performance: on how well our institutions meet specific goals.

And in the high-tech global economy, we need to make sure the degrees students pursue match the skills that businesses need.

Over the next decade, the jobs that are in highest demand will require at least some background in science, technology, engineering or math – the so-called STEM fields.

We're talking about software programmers and scientists, mathematicians and machinists, coders and chemists.

The best way to attract more of these high-paying jobs is to make sure our workers have the skills to fill them – and that is exactly what our STEM initiative will do.

With an initial investment of \$22 million, this initiative will help our universities purchase state-of-the-art equipment, expand lab space and – most importantly – produce more graduates in these fast-growing fields.

Investing in high-tech education will pack a huge punch for our economy.

Education must start early – but it can never stop.

With technology constantly advancing, we can't forget that learning needs to be a lifelong endeavor.

Every Missourian willing to work hard and learn something new – no matter what their age or education level – should have the opportunity to take that next step and move up the economic ladder.

I thank the legislature for working with us to strengthen our workforce training tools, and give more Missouri workers the opportunity to sharpen their skills, and get better jobs.

From preschool to graduate school, in total, my budget includes 493 million additional dollars for education.

Our growing economy, combined with our sound budget management, affords us this unique opportunity to invest in our students' future – our state's future.

It's our responsibility to do it.

But there are those who feel that instead of fully funding our schools, we should pull money out of our classrooms in order to experiment with our tax code.

Let's get something straight: I've held the line on taxes every year I've been Governor and will do so again this year.

Missouri's a low-tax state – sixth lowest in the nation – and we like it that way.

I've signed four tax cuts as your Governor – specific, targeted tax cuts that have helped our businesses expand and grow. For example, Missouri employers will save \$70 million this year alone because we cut the corporate franchise tax.

But here's what I won't do: I will not support anything that takes money out of our classrooms.

As we saw last summer, in community after community in all corners of our state, parents, teachers, administrators, school board members, business leaders and concerned citizens spoke out with one united voice.

The people of Missouri said they expect their elected leaders to support public schools, because they know that education is the best economic development tool there is.

High paying jobs, growing businesses, thriving communities – these are goals we share, so let's invest in the one thing we know will help us achieve them: a workforce that can compete worldwide.

This is the year to send a budget to my desk that puts us on track to fully funding our schools, and builds the Missouri our kids deserve.

We've shown that we can work together to create better opportunities for all Missourians. Just look at what we're doing – together – to serve Missourians with disabilities and mental illness.

In 2010, we passed landmark legislation to require insurance companies to cover the diagnosis and treatment of Autism Spectrum Disorders – and what a difference it's made for our kids.

Today, because of this law, 1.6 million Missourians have coverage for these proven treatments, and more than 2,500 Missourians were treated for autism spectrum disorders last year.

Our Partnership for Hope continues to be a tremendous and life-changing success for thousands of Missourians with developmental disabilities. My budget expands this vital program to even more Missourians, in more communities across the state.

For years, thousands of Missourians with developmental disabilities were forced to wait months – often years – to get the in-home Medicaid services they needed – people like Nate Huffman from St. Peters, who I met when we first launched the Partnership for Hope in 2010.

Back when he was in school, Nate had access to physical therapy and other services that helped him be more independent. He'd even gotten strong enough to walk around his high school track. But when he graduated, those services ended.

For eight years, Nate's condition and quality of life worsened while he was placed on a waiting list for in-home services. Eight years – it was heart-breaking. But that was before the Partnership for Hope.

Today, Nate is doing much better. His physical therapy is going well and he's able to communicate through a new computer system. He told me that his goal was to someday be able to walk around that track again – and thanks to the Partnership for Hope, he's getting closer to reaching that goal each and every day.

Because of Missourians like Nate, each year I've been in office, we've made it a priority to chip away at that waiting list.

And now I'm proud to report, this year that waiting list will no longer exist.

Our friends and neighbors will now get the life-changing services they need, when they need them.

On mental illness – as tragedies across the nation exposed dangerous gaps in our country's mental health safety net – we took action here in Missouri:

We added new mental health liaisons at each of our 29 community mental health centers, so that our law enforcement officers can focus on being cops, not frontline caregivers.

We launched seven targeted emergency room response teams, to ease the burden on our doctors and nurses.

And we made a historic investment in Mental Health First Aid training, so that more teachers, clergy, first responders and ordinary citizens can identify the signs of mental illness and know what to do.

Together, we are training more than 1,000 Missourians on these proven, life-saving techniques. And with your help this session, we'll train thousands more.

But as any member of law enforcement can tell you, there are those for whom preventative services are simply not enough. Some mental illnesses are so severe that those suffering from them are a danger to themselves and others.

Since 1851, this care has been provided at Fulton State Mental Hospital, Missouri's only maximum security psychiatric facility – a facility that is crumbling and in desperate need of replacement.

It's inadequate to the needs of patients. It's dangerous for the staff who care for them. And it's an embarrassment to our state.

Now is the time to take action.

That's why I look forward to working with you to address this most urgent of needs and issue bonds to support the construction of a new mental hospital in Fulton.

Interest rates are low. Our credit rating is high. And the need is undeniable. Friends, let's roll up our sleeves, work together, and for the safety of all our communities, get it done this year.

And as we intensify our efforts to make sure that Missourians with mental illness and developmental disabilities get the appropriate care – it's clear that we need more qualified professionals to provide that care.

Just look at the numbers – 104 of Missouri’s 114 counties are designated as mental health professional shortage areas; 72 counties lack even a licensed psychiatrist.

These are good jobs that are in demand now – we just need the qualified professionals to fill them. That is why my budget includes a \$20 million investment to help our community colleges and universities train 1,200 more mental health professionals.

From teaching a child with autism how to interact with peers, to helping law enforcement respond to individuals in mental health crisis, these health professionals will help keep our communities safe – and make sure all Missourians have the opportunity to live up to their God-given potential.

The priorities I’ve just laid out are by no means the only issues that require our attention this session:

We need to restore the public’s faith in what we do here by reinstating strict campaign contribution limits and passing comprehensive ethics reform.

We need to rein in the tax credit programs that don’t deliver a solid return on our investment.

And we need to end discrimination against LGBT Missourians in the workplace. No Missourian should be fired because of who they are or who they love. Last year, the Missouri Nondiscrimination Act passed the Senate with bipartisan support, but failed to get to my desk. Let’s get it done this year.

We need to fix the law that’s led to so much stress and uncertainty for families and schools, as thousands of students are transported from one district to another.

We need to have a robust discussion about our state’s long-term transportation infrastructure needs – and how to pay for them.

We need to develop a comprehensive energy plan for our state: one that balances the need for low-cost, reliable energy with our duty to be responsible stewards of the environment.

And we need to reauthorize the Missouri Rx program, to prevent more than 200,000 seniors and Missourians with disabilities from paying more for their prescription drugs. Let’s work together, as we did just three years ago, to extend this essential help for Missourians in need.

But the most significant improvement we could make to the health and wellbeing of our state is Medicaid, and it needs to get done this year.

Since New Year’s Day, Missouri taxpayers have spent \$115 million and counting – \$5.47 million a day – to improve and reform health care in other states, like Arkansas and Arizona, New Jersey and Iowa, Michigan and North Dakota. This adds up to \$2 billion, or \$500 for every Missouri taxpayer, every year.

Each day we don’t act, these states use Missourians’ tax dollars to implement innovative reforms, like rewards for making healthier lifestyle choices and penalties for missing doctors’ appointments.

Each day we don’t act, Missouri’s Medicaid system continues as it has for years, without additional protections for

taxpayers, or new measures to promote personal responsibility.

Each day we don't act, thousands of Missouri women aren't getting the preventive health care they need to detect breast or cervical cancer early – while there's still time to treat it.

And each day we don't act, nearly 300,000 working Missourians go another day without the treatment they desperately need, for no other reason than they live in Branson instead of Bentonville, in Cape Girardeau instead of Cairo, in Maryville instead of Muscatine.

And if you don't see these folks knocking on your doors or lighting up your phone lines, it's because they don't have time. They're working to pay the bills and make ends meet.

We all know there are problems with Obamacare, and Washington's implementation of it has been abysmal.

But rejecting Medicaid won't fix any of those things. It won't keep Missourians from having to pay federal taxes, or exempt our businesses from new requirements under the law.

Instead, by standing still, we're making the things we don't like about Obamacare even worse, forcing Missourians to bear all the costs of this law – and reap none of the benefits.

Think about that.

The people who are suffering now as a result of our failure to act don't work in the White House – they work the night shift in our factories. They wait tables and scrub floors. They drive snow plows and look after our kids.

Right now, hundreds of thousands of these working Missourians can't afford to get the basic health services they need to lead healthy, productive lives.

They're folks like Anita Sutherland from Van Buren. Anita was a home health care worker who now works part-time at Head Start.

Being uninsured has already taken a toll. A year ago, Anita was diagnosed with uterine cancer and had to leave her full time job. Since then, she's racked up over \$100,000 in medical bills, and is suffering from complications of her cancer treatment. Today, buried in a mountain of debt and unable to afford the medical care she needs, Anita doesn't see a way out. She feels hopeless.

But when we strengthen Medicaid, Anita will be covered. She'll be able to get the treatment she needs and go back to working full time. She'll have hope.

Working Missourians like Anita aren't looking for a handout. They just want to get a checkup without wiping out their bank account.

I challenge each one of you to think of any other bill that would make this kind of real and immediate difference – the kind of difference Medicaid expansion would make – in the lives of the people we represent.

I challenge each of you to consider how history will judge those who had the power to help people like Anita – and chose not to.

I challenge each of you to explain why it makes more sense to pay for Medicaid in other states, than it does to reform it in ours.

The path before us is clear:

We can make sure working folks can access affordable health care coverage.

We can improve and reform Medicaid in Missouri.

We can help people.

As the book of Isaiah says: "If you satisfy.... the needs of the afflicted, then your light shall rise in the darkness and your night will become like the noonday."

At this time last year, the same Medicaid debate was taking place in state capitols across the country.

And since that time, we've seen Governors and legislators, Democrats and Republicans, in other states, come together to reform their health care systems. But here in Missouri we stood still. And now we've fallen behind.

This year, Missouri is paying the cost.

This year, Missourians are suffering the consequences.

I look forward to working with all of you to bring affordable health coverage to working families in Missouri and reform Medicaid the Missouri way.

One year ago, many of us gathered in St. Louis to mourn the loss of an icon – Missouri's adopted son, Stan Musial.

Stan the Man was a member of the Greatest Generation who put his career on hold to serve in World War II – and went on to become the greatest hitter in baseball history.

Stan was called baseball's "perfect warrior" – because while he swung a loud bat, he also carried himself with a quiet dignity – always a gentleman.

He was known to say, "Every day you put this jersey on, it's a privilege."

The same can be said for all of us in this room.

Every day when you put that pin on your lapel, and enter these doors to do the people's business, it's a privilege.

And with that privilege comes responsibility.

The people of Missouri count on us to look out for their families as if they were our families.

To focus on what matters: Better jobs. Better schools. Better opportunities for their children.

And it's easy to get caught up in the political back and forth of the day. Or the controversy of the hour. Or the latest tweet.

But we must be bigger than that, because the work we do here is very, very real.

It's real to the parents in Bolivar who didn't go to college but save money every week so someday their children can.

It's real to the farmer in Trenton who nearly lost his crop during the drought of 2012, but has come charging back.

It's real to the child with autism in O'Fallon who's getting the ABA treatment he needs to learn and thrive.

And you better believe it's real to the family in Joplin who lost everything and could have moved away and started anew – but they chose to stay right there to rebuild the town they love.

And their state government has been with them every step of the way –because that's what we do. That's why we serve.

We're here to make a difference for those who work hard and need a hand – often times for people we'll never meet.

Because the legacy we leave will not be measured by votes on Election Day or back-slaps in these hallways – it will be measured by the lasting impact we have on the communities we serve.

The opportunity we've been given – to make this kind of difference in the lives of those we represent – is as rare as it is fleeting.

Ten years from now, when trucks are still rolling off the line in Claycomo, folks might not remember the Missouri Manufacturing Jobs Act.

Twenty years from now, when the mom whose insurance paid for the cancer treatment that saved her life attends her son's college graduation, she won't know the names of the lawmakers who voted for Medicaid expansion.

And 30 years from now, when the student who was the first in her family to go to college takes the reins of a Fortune 500 company, she probably won't credit the high quality preschool she attended.

But we will. And we'll know we focused on the right things. We'll know we made the right choices.

That's our call to action.

That's the sacred responsibility we hold.

In the short time we've been given, let's make it count.

Together, let's build the Missouri our kids deserve.

Thank you, and God bless.

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